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## BRIEFER COMMUNICATIONS.

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### UTILITY, ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY.

In "The Theory of Sociology," \* I contended that "political economy," viewed as a science of commercial relations or market values, and "pure economics," conceived as a science of subjective utility, cost and value, are social sciences, and that neither can stand, in a classification of the sciences, logically antecedent to theoretical sociology. Both of them, I claimed, presuppose sociology, because, as I undertook to show, subjective utility has been created by social conditions and was not antecedent to them.

I did not expect that these conclusions would pass unchallenged. Had they done so I should have been disappointed. In so difficult a matter as this truth can be found only through patient scrutiny. I am therefore greatly indebted to Professor Patten for his kindly, but positive and thoughtful criticism, which was published in the *ANNALS* of September. Apparently our differences are many and irreconcilable. In reality most of them will disappear, I think, upon careful examination.

In his able paper on "The Failure of Biologic Sociology," † Dr. Patten "tried to show that the place of economics in the hierarchy of the sciences is before that of sociology." In his communication on "The Beginnings of Utility," ‡ he reaffirms that judgment, and contends that utility, and even a theory of utility, are antecedent to social relations. Two questions are thus distinctly presented: Is the science of economics logically precedent to sociology? To what extent is utility antecedent to social relations?

So far as the discussion between Dr. Patten and myself is concerned, the answer to the first question is plain. It is somewhat surprising, after reading Dr. Patten's broad claim for economics, to find that his whole dissent from my opinion reduces to a difference in our respective uses of a single word. He would promptly admit that political economy in the classical English sense of the term—the political economy of market values as elaborated by Smith, Ricardo and Mill, is a branch of social science and presupposes sociology. Furthermore, he says that subjective cost "has social antecedents." This is an admission that if pure economics be conceived as a study of subjective

\* Supplement to the *ANNALS*, July, 1894

† *ANNALS*, May, 1894.

‡ *ANNALS*, September, 1894.

utilities, costs and values, in their inter-relations, pure economics, too, is a social science, which presupposes sociology. Apart from the question of the origin of utility, this is all that I have claimed, namely, that classical political economy as an account of market values, and pure economics as a study of the mutual relations of subjective utilities, costs and values, are built upon sociological data, and presuppose theoretical sociology. Evidently, therefore, when Dr. Patten, after admitting all this, still contends that the place of economics in the hierarchy of the sciences is before that of sociology, he has some other economics in mind, and is using the word in an unusual way.

Fortunately his meaning is not in doubt if one reads him carefully. It is because he thinks that "theories of utility and goods" are "necessary pre-suppositions in any study of social relations" that he puts economics before sociology. The context shows that it is not the mathematical theories of final and total utility in their present form that Dr. Patten has here in mind, though his language would seem to include them. It is rather an expanded theory, in which the phenomena of initial utility can have full recognition. In fact, it is a theory of initial utility as conditioned by various kinds of free goods unequally distributed in the environment, that he is particularly thinking of as being scientifically antecedent to explanations of society. In other words, if I understand Dr. Patten rightly, he holds that the relation of the environment to utility, and especially to initial utility (the environment being conceived of as an irregular differentiation and distribution of free goods in space), presents a sufficient number of correlated problems to constitute a distinct science. From the paper on "The Failure of Biologic Sociology," I infer that he would put this science not only before sociology, but before psychology and even before biology as well.

This is an interesting thought, and I wish that Dr. Patten had done himself justice by stating it more explicitly, and at length. The suggested science, if constructed at all, would necessarily be the abstract and highly general science of the relations of physical, mental and social life, to the physical environment. It would be related to biology, psychology and sociology, just as, according to my conception, sociology is related to political economy (the science of market values), to jurisprudence, and to politics. If Dr. Patten constructs such a science he will compass one of the greatest scientific achievements of this or of any age. If, in addition, he persuades the scientific world to call this science by the general name economics, and to designate all more special economic studies by the older term, political economy, that too will be a noteworthy accomplishment. But he ought to put aside all excess of modesty and say explicitly that nobody

but himself ever before so concerned of economics, and admit frankly that the economics which other students have thought about, and which comes to mind when they see or hear the word, is a social science, grounded in sociology.

Let us now examine the second question: To what extent is utility antecedent to social relations?

It is evident that discussion has brought us to the point where we must decide whether we will use the word utility to mean a relation between some external thing or fact, on the one hand, and any advantageous change product within an organism, on the other hand, or whether we will restrict its meaning to a relation between an external thing or fact and an advantageous internal change of which the organism is at the moment conscious. This necessity confronts us whether we are talking about initial, final or total utility. To take an illustration: if a "dose" of guano be applied to a hill of Indian corn the plants will undergo an initial change, favorable in the sense of normal growth. Successive doses will effect further advantageous changes, but in lessening degree, until further doses would be wasteful or injurious. There is here no consciousness, no scale of pleasure, and, of course, no subjective utility. Yet the relations of the changes described, to the environment, to the supply of "goods," to various kinds of "goods," and so on, are evidently governed by laws like those that govern the phenomena of subjective utility. Shall we then not call the relation between "goods" and such organic changes by the word utility? I can see no good reason why we should not do so, provided we use a distinguishing adjective. "Physiological" would, perhaps, be as accurate as any. By physiological utility we would then mean a relation subsisting between an external thing or fact and a favorable organic change. By subjective utility we would mean a similar relation of which the organism is pleasurably conscious.\*

Of physiological utility so understood we can certainly have a theory, because all its phenomena admit of formulation in scientific law. No less certainly will the theory, when elaborated, be logically antecedent to the sciences of psychology and sociology. It will afford data by means of which these sciences can be made truly deductive in form.

I admit, then, that a theory of goods and of physiological utility is precedent to sociology. When in "The Theory of Sociology" I discussed the relation of utility to social relations, I was talking about subjective utility only. Moreover, when I said that "it can be shown that, apart from association there could never have been any such

\* Dr. Patten, I suppose, would not favor the use of the word utility in any but the subjective sense.

thing as subjective utility," I was talking about the subjective utility of recent and familiar economic discussion—namely, a consciousness of utility as varying in degree from "initial" to "marginal." A dawning consciousness of mere initial utility—that is, a recognition of the satisfaction afforded by a first-consumed portion of food, unaccompanied by any recognition of the lesser utility of succeeding portions,—must undoubtedly be assumed to be casually antecedent to social phenomena. But nothing that Dr. Patten has written, in his criticism or elsewhere, seems to me to invalidate the proposition that all subjective utility which is more than mere initial satisfaction, is a product of social evolution.

I ask the reader to remember that I took pains to argue that subjective utility is more than mere pleasurable feeling of any volume or degree, however small. To constitute subjective utility, I held, pleasure must be (1) voluminous enough to admit of appreciable distinctions of more and less, (2) it must be recognized as caused or produced by an external condition or thing. Having so defined my terms, I endeavored to prove that, (*a*) apart from suggestion, imitation and concurrence, pleasurable feeling could not become quantitatively sufficient to admit of appreciable distinctions of more or less, and that, (*b*) apart from social relations, intellectual development must be inadequate for the perception of such distinctions.

In criticism Dr. Patten says that "this line of reasoning overlooks the fact that the failure to recognize degrees of utility may be due to the intensity of the pleasure, as well as to its lack of clearness and volume." I confess that it had not occurred to me, and that I do not now see that the fact said to be overlooked has any bearing on the question. Granting that intensity of feeling may destroy perception, I should suppose that, before feeling becomes too voluminous for appreciable distinctions of more or less, it must become at least voluminous enough.

My conclusions are inductions from observed facts. All animal life of which we have any knowledge, from protozoa to man, is in frequent contact with other animal life, of its own and of different species. Most of it exists in swarms, flocks or bands. Creatures of the most rudimentary consciousness are influenced in all their activities by contact with each other. The activity of each is suggestive and stimulating to others. Each imitates others. This is true of insects, of fishes, of birds, of mammals. Elaborate studies of mental evolution in animals, of the mental development of the human infant, and of the phenomena of hypnotism, all lead to the conclusion that suggestion and imitation are among the most important phenomena of dawning consciousness. In the struggle for food every individual of

every species is in large measure dependent on the discoveries made by fellow-creatures and on the instinctive tendency to imitate the successful. It is therefore certain that animal life could not have survived through its evolutionary infancy if individual isolation rather than association had been the rule. There certainly was a time when consciousness, as manifested in the animal life of this planet, was too rudimentary to distinguish degrees of utility. There certainly came a time when such distinctions began to be made. To overthrow my conclusions, then, the objector must establish the amazing assumption that during thousands, perhaps millions, of generations, animal organisms owed nothing to association.

Without appealing to observation, Dr. Patten puts forward an ingenious *a priori* theory. He assumes a stage in animal evolution in which there is no conscious distinction of successive degrees of utility; to this extent he agrees with me. But in that pre-social stage, he thinks, there is an intense consciousness of initial utility. Initial utility being so great, the creature experiencing it is necessarily anti-social, Dr. Patten supposes, because, although a hungry beast may have captured many times as much prey as he can eat, and could therefore share it with other beasts in a social way, he will yet attach the same value to the final increment that he attaches to the first. Only when he learns to distinguish degrees of utility will he tolerate the presence of a fellow-prowler, and so enter into social relations.

This is not only ingenious; it is plausible. At first glance it looks reasonable; but it will not bear examination. It offers no answer to the previous question: How could an isolated individual organism survive, and multiply its experiences, until a relatively high degree of consciousness was evolved? Worse yet, it offers no way out of a difficulty that Dr. Patten has raised for himself, namely, how does an isolated individual, that is too intensely conscious of initial utility to perceive any lesser degrees, presently become aware of marginal utility, and conclude to be sociable? Worst of all, it ignores the obvious, familiar and true explanation of the difficulty just named. The "being who has intense feelings" will not often be permitted to exploit his theory of initial utility to its marginal possibilities. Fellow-beings with similar tastes and feelings have a way of dropping in before the mental evolution of their host is completed, and of settling the question of toleration according to

"The good old way, the simple plan."

It is through repeated experiences with unbidden guests that animals, and men too, acquire a good deal of their knowledge of degrees of utility, very much as the fox in the fable discovered the marginal

utility of unattainable grapes. Another part of it, however, is acquired in a very different, but not less social, way, through the necessity of providing for brooding or nursing mothers and for the young.

But while it is impossible to believe that apart from association there could ever have been a conscious recognition of degrees of utility, and, therefore, impossible to believe that subjective utility as the term has been used and understood hitherto in economic discussion is antecedent to social relations, Dr. Patten is quite right in maintaining that some consciousness of initial utility is antecedent to social phenomena, both logically and evolutionally. If by the terms suggestion, imitation and association, we mean psychical, rather than merely physiological phenomena, we must, of course, admit that creatures capable of distinguishing each other, are capable of distinguishing food objects, and, therefore, of recognizing initial utilities. Consequently, if we are to extend the meaning of the term subjective utility to cover the phenomenon of a consciousness of initial utility unaccompanied by any recognition of degrees of utility—and I see no objection to doing so—I must modify my statement that “apart from association there could never have been any such thing as subjective utility.” I must say, instead, that apart from association there could never have been any subjective utility beyond a dawning consciousness of initial satisfactions.

As thus conceived, the theory of utility runs like a connecting thread through biology, psychology and sociology. In biology, we have the theory of physiological utility. In psychology, it becomes the theory of initial subjective utility. In sociology, it becomes the theory of subjective utility in quantitative degrees. Finally, when we encounter in human society the phenomena of conscious calculation and production of utilities, we have the material for a special social science, namely, political economy, the science of the social phenomena of a conscious calculation and production of utilities.

If, now, Dr. Patten can make abstraction of all the laws of utility, biological, psychological and sociological, and can put them together in a larger synthesis than has been attempted hitherto, he will create a general philosophy of the sciences of life—a formulation of the general principles from which their particular laws may be deduced. If such a philosophy can appropriate and thenceforth hold the name of “economics,” well and good. But it cannot be regarded as in any sense a “social” science. Dr. Patten cannot claim, as I think he has been disposed to do, that such an economics, rather than sociology, is the fundamental science of society. The economics of his conception is neither sociology, psychology, nor biology, but a logic which

is theoretically distinct from and preliminary to them all. The fundamental social science is sociology.

As the reader will have discovered, my own notions of utility and its relations to social phenomena have been made more definite by Dr. Patten's criticism. I am grateful to him for it.

FRANKLIN H. GIDDINGS.

*Columbia College.*

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#### THE ORGANIC CONCEPT OF SOCIETY.

In a recent book \* Professor Small discusses and defends the organic concept of society and quotes certain passages from a paper † of mine to show how this concept has been misunderstood. I, in turn, might properly complain that my meaning has been misconstrued. There is, however, nothing to be gained in joining an issue on so technical a point. If Professor Small's book had appeared in advance of my paper, I would have gladly referred to it for a statement of the doctrines to which I take exception. His book strengthens rather than weakens my opposition to the use of biologic analogies in the discussion of social questions. A clear and definite statement of a false position often exposes its weakness.

The organic concept of society finds its chief strength and support in the phenomena of co-operation. On every side we see some form of division of labor; families unite for common ends, industries are co-ordinated on a large scale, villages, cities and even nations become organized parts of a larger whole, and in this way is built up the vast complexus that is commonly called the industrial organism. Accepting this industrial organism as a fact, it is necessary to inquire into its cause. Is it a part of the nature of things, the outcome of purely social forces or is it due to the objective conditions which surround society? Evidently the latter. Certain peculiarities of soil and climate give certain localities the advantage in particular forms of production, certain deposits of iron, coal and other minerals give an advantage to other localities in these industries and certain other peculiarities of matter and of the crust of the earth give a great advantage to serial production—to round-about methods—as opposed to direct production.

The complex economic world is the outcome of the influence of these objective conditions upon the choices of individuals under these conditions. Each individual becomes a part of the economic mechanism in order to increase his sum of utilities and to decrease his costs.

\* "An Introduction to the Study of Society," by A. W. Small and G. E. Vincent. New York: 1894.

† "The Place of University Extension," *University Extension*, February, 1894.